

TRANSLATOR'S INSIGHT

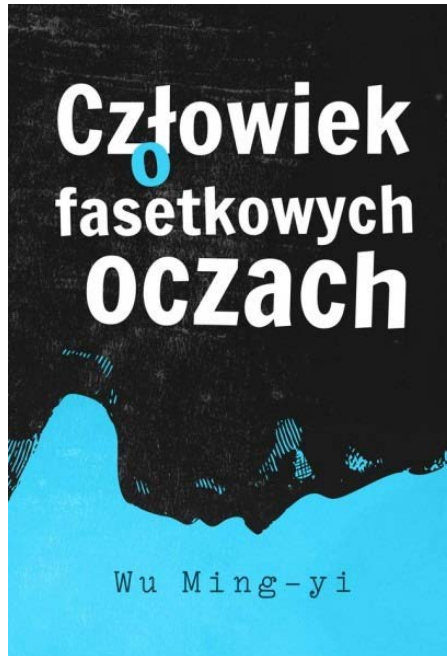
The Multi-Faceted World of Wu Ming-yi

Katarzyna Sarek

The Man with Compound Eyes is a unique and eye-opening novel. It mixes reality with fantasy, as semi-magical events occur throughout the novel, and plunge the reader into exotic scenery. The author creates his own genre, called eco-fantasy or nature writing. Ecological events, described in a surreal and mystic way, together with other plots, create the texture of the novel. It is a great story, full of beauty and well-developed with engaging protagonists.

I owe my first encounter with Wu Ming-yi's prose to my friend Wei-yun Lin-Górecka, a Taiwanese poet and translator, who bound her life to Poland. She has been living in Kraków for many years and actively promoting Polish literature and culture in Taiwan. In 2012 she asked me to translate for her a few fragments of a strange story about the imaginary island Wayo Wayo and a brave young man, Atile, who travels across Pacific on his small boat. By day he meets a pack of sperm whales and by night he encounters the spirits of the second sons of Wayo Wayo. These snippets were so bizarre and magical that I was immediately enchanted, and asked Wei-yun Lin-Górecka to lend me her copy of *The Man with Compound Eyes*.

And that's how the story started. I read the novel in two days and decided that I had to translate it into Polish. I prepared a short sample and sent it to many publishing houses. Of course, without any success. At that time I was an inexperienced translator and no editor would give a chance to such a new hand in the field of Chinese literary translation. Besides, at that time Taiwanese literature was absent in Poland. Not even one piece of work of prose or poetry was available in Polish. It was a virgin land and no one wanted to take the risk and invest in a new writer from a faraway country. As a very stubborn person, I didn't give up. I knew that I just had to wait and one day I would get a chance to translate Wu Ming-yi's works.



Several years have passed, I've managed to obtain a Ph.D. in Chinese linguistics, to get an academic job at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and to become a Chinese-Polish literary translator with some achievements.

Perseverance always pays off. When Marzena Stefańska from a small publishing house Kwiaty Orientu contacted me in 2017 and asked me to recommend an interesting Chinese novel, I didn't hesitate for a second. As I expected, *The Man with Compound Eyes* also captivated Marzena Stefańska, and she quickly decided to publish the novel. Eventually, my dream of many years was fulfilled and I got the chance to spend a few months with Wu Ming-yi's thoughts and words.

I knew that translating *The Man with Compound Eyes* would not be easy, but when I started I was overwhelmed. The text was very dense, the sentences complicated, and I was struggling to keep pace with the plot. The first thirty pages were the hardest, but later I began to feel the atmosphere of the novel and to feel comfortable with the style of the writer. Although I got used to the writer's style, every once in a while I was convinced that I do not know anything about the natural environment of Taiwan. The flora and fauna of Taiwan play a prominent role in the novel. I had to meticulously check most of the names of the insects, plants, trees and animals. After digging in the dictionaries, very often I could only sigh because there were no Polish equivalents. In such cases, I decided to stick with Latin names, and in my opinion, it just increases the charm of the novel.

Happily, I was in Taiwan during the summer of 2018 and could familiarize myself with the local climate, food, and plants. My stay in Kaohsiung helped me greatly to understand Taiwanese realities and to avoid many mistakes. Aboriginal languages and customs, I have to admit, were also quite significant obstacles. The most difficult for me were the

descriptions of everyday life, cooking, and hunting. They were full of tools, ingredients, and types of equipment not used in Europe. If my Taiwanese friends couldn't help me, as even for them Bunun or Ami tribe customs were quite obscure, I had to seek for an answer in scholarly books devoted to this topic. I do not have to mention that it was very time-consuming. But even with all the difficulties along the way, I have to confess that *The Man with Compound Eyes* is the most rewarding book I have translated so far. All the knowledge and all the magic from this novel have left a deep mark on me.

Insightful reading of the novel, indispensable during the translation, affected me also as a reader. I learned a lot about the condition of nature in Taiwan, as well as in other parts of the world, and I realized how everything - man, animals, the climate - is related and



connected. Aboriginal encounters with modernity echo global environmental crises that impact everyone. Wu Ming-yi's novel, in which no single character's viewpoint is privileged, creates a new perspective and compels us to reevaluate our human-centric approach. It also builds an urge to do something, to engage in ecological activity and treat better not only living beings but everything around us. Because mountains, rivers, and seas also need our care.

The immersive and achingly beautiful writing led me into a world of magical realism, and I returned to my reality full of admiration for the writer's talent, but also with a strong awareness of the responsibility lying on my shoulders as the translator of a now already published work.

Katarzyna Sarek is Associate Professor at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Jagiellonian University in Krakow. She is also a Chinese and French translator and member of the Polish Literary Translators' Association. Her translations include works by Lu Xun, Shen Fu and Yu Hua, and she is now translating Yan Lianke's novels.

CALL FOR PAPERS

"Enlightening" Taiwan: Communicating Knowledge as/in Social Activism in the Post-Sunflower Era"

15 November 2019, University of Sussex

Workshop Organisers: Chia-Yu Liang and Po-Han Lee (University of Sussex)

Keynote Speaker: Dr Yeh, Hao (Associate Professor, National Chengchi University)

Social activism in Taiwan has attracted scholarly efforts from various disciplines, and the Sunflower Movement in 2014 has broadened the scope of studies on this subject, due to its geopolitical significance. However, one specific area of practice is under exploration and needs a better understanding, that is, a new form of intellectual engagement that arose around the time of the Sunflower Movement and has been continued until today. This phenomenon, framed by this workshop as "knowledge communication", performs the functioning of public media in contemporary Western societies, while also forging social solidarity as pubs in England or cafés in France did during the Enlightenment era. Furthermore, it promotes engagement through blogposts and YouTube videos, thus forming a multi-level interaction between academia and the public.

The workshop aims to examine theoretically various aspects of this new phenomenon, by providing answers to the core questions below: 1) What are the rationales for launching respective platforms for knowledge communications?; 2) What are the achievements and hurdles of each of these practices in the last decade?; 3) What is the significance of these practice as a whole for Taiwan, particularly in relation to global politics, global intellectual history, and other relevant domains of knowledge production?; 4) How do these challenge existing discourses with regard to Taiwan and Taiwanese-ness?

We welcome proposals from academics/activists, stakeholders, participants and 'witnesses' of this intellectual engagement in/as social activism on the following platforms: public fora such as Formosa Forum, Philosophy Friday, and Theology Sunday; online blogs such as Guava Anthropology, Public Medicine Times, StreetCorner Sociology, Kám-Á-Tiàm Forum of History, Plain Law Movement, WhoGoverns TW, Gushi [story], New Bloomer, TalkEcon, Kuroshio Focus, etc.

Deadline for Abstract Submission: **12 August 2019**

Announcement of accepted proposals: **19 August 2019**

Deadline for confirmation of acceptance: **2 September 2019**

Deadline for full paper submission: **1 November 2019**

Please send the abstract to: khoffman0331@gmail.com. This is also the contact address for any further inquiries.

Drawing on the academic outcomes of the Workshop, we intend to publish the papers as a special issue of the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*. Please let us know if you do not wish your contribution to be included in this project. Please also note that we are unable to offer any bursary support due to budgetary limits.